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Beauty Isn't Everything in Your Downtown Plan

Philip L. Walker, AICP Each year dozens of communities across the country embark on plans aimed at revitalizing their struggling downtowns. Civic leaders recognize the importance of their downtowns economically, socially, and culturally, as well as the less tangible roles downtowns play, such as defining the community's image and level of civic pride. Creating a downtown plan means an investment of time, money, and effort. Despite this serious resource commitment, many downtown plans fail to achieve their ultimate goal of revitalization. What causes this unfortunate yet common scenario? There are two reasons. The first is the plan focused too much on physical improvements to the downtown and not enough on the economic and social realm. The other reason is the plan did indeed address the downtown holistically, but was not implemented in that same holistic manner.

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Courtesy City of Charlevoix

Charlevoix, Michigan, is a small town with a year-round bustling downtown. A designated Great Places in America, Charlevoix's East Park, pictured here, combines a well-connected downtown community space used by residents and visitors with the beauty of Round Lake and nearby Lake Michigan.

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For obvious reasons, the recommendations for physical improvements to the downtown tend to receive the greatest attention and interest. They are tangible and easily conveyed through graphics. Although expensive, physical improvements are also relatively straightforward and simple to implement—you design them and then you build them. Economic and market issues are equally important for most downtowns, and may be far more important for many communities. Yet the market issues are strongly intertwined with physical planning, so they must be considered and planned in coordination. Countless downtown organizations have learned the hard way that a singular focus on physical enhancements is not the solution for long-term success. Robin Taffler, the former Main Street manager for Murray, Kentucky, observed, "It's not just about pretty; it's about a fundamental change in thinking. People get really hung up on the streetscape end of things and seem to forget or ignore the importance of the rest. . . . I wish in Murray's plan that we literally put 'streetscape' at the back of the document and the other issues up front to reinforce their absolute importance."

Two of the most important ingredients to a downtown's success are a density of people and diversity of uses. In tandem, those two characteristics lead to dynamic places that will sustain themselves over time. Rather than competing in beauty contests, the biggest challenge for most communities is developing richly varied destinations that will attract a critical mass of people to live, work, shop, and play in the downtown.

Countless downtowns have spent money on beautiful new streetscapes built of the highest quality materials, only to continue seeing them flanked by empty storefronts. Assuming that a vibrant and economically healthy downtown is the ultimate goal for most downtown plans, leaders and officials must focus on the creation of destinations for both visitors and everyday users. This principle is not based upon having one or two major attractions, but rather a multitude of uses and activities, such as retail, services, and entertainment. Success requires hard work, yet the formula for success is not as mysterious as many believe. It simply requires: 1) identifying the optimal mix of retail, offices, housing, institutions, and other uses; 2) developing a strategy for retaining, expanding, and recruiting uses consistent with that mix; and 3) putting that strategy into action. Planners and officials must address numerous details in implementing this approach, including: undertaking a market analysis; producing marketing materials; adopting targeted financial incentives; cultivating property owners, developers, and leasing agents; and other similar measures. The primary goal of attracting more people to the downtown—both temporary visitors and year-round inhabitants—should never be overlooked.

Philip Walker

In 2004, Gallatin, Tennessee, commissioned a downtown master plan to spur revitalization. While the streetscape was redeveloped, a downtown library and farmers market were constructed, and several new businesses have opened, a more dramatic turnaround might have been possible if the plan's economic and market strategies had been as vigorously pursued.

While an attractive and well-designed downtown is certainly an advantage, attractiveness is rarely the sole motivation for those drawn to it. How many people visit a downtown merely to enjoy its new sidewalks and landscaping? They might come once after the streetscape project is completed and the ribbon is cut, but the novelty will be short-lived unless there is more. Conversely, there are numerous examples across the country of vibrant, prosperous downtowns with dull, worn concrete sidewalks and sparse streetscape furnishings.

Unexpected Benefits of Downtown Residents

. . . marketing downtown housing can go beyond the usual suspects (young people, retirees, etc.) to include those . . . who work downtown and would like to cut their commutes or who are otherwise drawn to living downtown because of its amenities. According to Donovan Rypkema (2005), downtown residents typically spend three to four times as much money downtown as do downtown employees. And Randall Gross . . . reports that downtown residents, on an annual basis, spend more on downtown retail than do their downtown "destination shopper" counterparts, making them clearly a prized retail market segment.

—From *Downtown Planning for Smaller and Midsized Communities* by Philip L. Walker, APA Planners Press, 2009.

Six Strategies for Regulating Big Boxes

Julie A. Tappendorf

There is a tension between a community's desire to protect its character and existing businesses, a governing body's desire to increase tax revenues and bring in local jobs, and community residents' desire to save money.

So how can a community balance these interests? Here are six strategies for regulating big boxes to assist communities in encouraging projects that are consistent with a community's diverse goals and interests.

Tip One—Require Special Zoning Approvals. Many communities require retailers to obtain special zoning approvals for large retail projects (such as an Illinois city's special use requirement for stores over 50,000 square feet). Special zoning approvals can provide a municipality with more control and review over a project, and authorize the imposition of conditions to address the impact of a large retail store, such as requiring enhancements to parking lot landscaping and upgrades to building architecture.

Tip Two—Adopt Specific Zoning Regulations. Some communities have implemented regulations on large retailers ranging from full-scale bans or caps on stores over a certain size (such as a Vermont city's ban on stores over 75,000 square feet) to specific regulations to address the unique planning concerns that may not be addressed in typical zoning regulations. For example, traffic and parking impacts for a 50,000-square-foot retail building are far different than for a 5,000-square-foot retail store and may need special treatment in a zoning code.

Tip Three—Enact Design Standards. Another tool is to enact design standards for large retail buildings. For example, a Wyoming city requires stores over 25,000 square feet to be compatible with the town's architectural character and history, including a requirement that brick, sandstone, or other natural building materials be used on at least 30 percent of the facade, and that architectural details be added to break up monotonous building facades. Others require varied roof lines and "four-sided" architecture to eliminate the expansive blank wall effect. Still other communities have established site design standards, including "pedestrian-friendly" elements, restrictions on front-field parking, and substantial parking lot landscaping.

Tip Four—Establish Vacant Building Regulations. One of the concerns frequently raised with large retail projects is what happens if the retailer relocates or abandons the building. Restrictive covenants are widely used by large retailers to restrict the rental or sale of buildings to competitors after a retailer vacates the building. This type of covenant causes various problems to the community. First, vacant retail space generates no sales taxes, typically a substantial portion of a local revenue. Second, retail vacancy negatively impacts other businesses in the area by generating less customer traffic and lower revenues. Finally, and most important from a planning perspective, empty retail space tends to become an eyesore, particularly when the building and site are very large and not adequately maintained. Even if the retailer continues to pay rent to the owner or maintains ownership of the building, when daily operations at a particular site cease, general site maintenance typically suffers.

There are a couple of tools to address the vacant big box. Some communities have adopted "dark store ordinances" that mandate that owners market buildings as soon as they become vacant and void any clause or covenant that restricts owners from leasing property to another tenant. Other communities have enacted ordinances requiring developers to provide a bond to cover demolition costs if the retailer abandons a building and it remains vacant.

Tip Five—Negotiate. A community might consider entering into a development agreement with a retailer to provide control to the municipality over the development process as well as give assurance to the retailer that a project will proceed as approved in the agreement. One Illinois community negotiated a development agreement with a home improvement store that prohibits the retailer from restricting the rental or sale of the building to a competitor in the event the building becomes vacant. The retailer also agreed to a special service area to levy taxes to cover maintenance of the site and building in the event that it became vacant. Other terms included enhanced parking lot landscaping and architectural upgrades.

Tip Six—Consider Financial Incentives. Financial incentives, if used carefully, can also result in a better project. For example, a municipality might agree to rebate a portion of sales taxes or discount permit fees in exchange for an agreement not to restrict future retail use of the building if it becomes vacant, and for architectural and site upgrades that might not otherwise be part of the initial project.

Conclusion

Big boxes can be friend or foe, but careful and comprehensive prior planning and thorough and thoughtful negotiation with a retailer can address many of the negative impacts a large retailer might have on a community.

The Owensboro Metropolitan Board of Adjustment. From left to right: Marty Warren; Sean Dysinger; Madison Silvert, legal counsel; Gary Noffsinger, executive director; Christian Pantle, chair; Ward Pedley, vice chair; Ruthann Mason, secretary; Rev. Larry Hostetter; Clay Taylor.

Four Decades of Planning in Owensboro

Karen Finucan Clarkson

The Greenbelt Walking Trail runs through the Heartlands Development, a planned residential project with a variety of housing. The developer also included an arterial roadway proposed in the community's Transportation Plan.

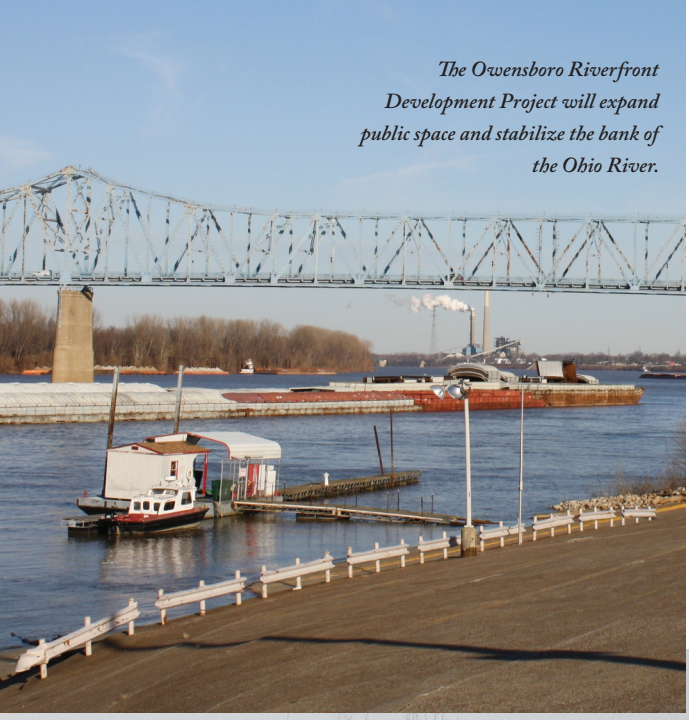
As it marks its 40th anniversary, the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission in Kentucky has played a major role in guiding change in the community. "I think we have an excellent comprehensive plan that has helped turn the community around and get us headed in the right direction," says Ward Pedley, vice chair of the commission.

Established as a joint commission, the panel handles planning issues for two cities and Daviess County. Five of the 10 planning commissioners are appointed by the mayor of Owensboro, four by the county's judge executive, and one by the mayor of Whiteville. The four-year terms are staggered and expire at the end of December. There are no term limits.

Planning commissioners represent a range of backgrounds, experience, and professions, according to commission chair Drew Kirkland. "All economic levels in Owensboro are covered on the board," he says. "I run a family-owned scrap iron and metal business and we have a developer, president of a private Catholic college, a farmer, an electrician, and a factory worker."

Commissioners, who are unpaid, meet the second Thursday of every month and their meetings are televised live. "If you miss the meeting, it's replayed throughout the month on the local TV station," says Kirkland.

On issues involving subdivision requests and new streets and infrastructure, the commission has decision-making authority. For rezonings, it serves in an advisory capacity, making recommendations to the



The Owensboro Riverfront Development Project will expand public space and stabilize the bank of the Ohio River.

Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission

local governing bodies. "We do things a little different here in Owensboro and Daviess County," says Gary L. Noffsinger, AICP, OMPC's executive director. "The planning commission's recommendation becomes final 21 days after it is made unless someone appeals, asking the city council or county fiscal court to hear it. There are very few times when people contest the commission's recommendation."

While some in the community either don't fully grasp the role of planning and zoning or, as Ward Pedley puts it, "just don't like regulations," most find the commission responsive and responsible. Pedley, a developer by trade, paid careful attention to commission actions well before his appointment last year. As part of the local home builders group, he and other members review the performance of the planning commission and staff "and we have found it to be excellent," he says.

Focusing on Downtown Owensboro

Despite the downturn in the economy, planning is under way to revitalize downtown Owensboro and increase amenities along the Ohio River. With a $40 million grant from the federal government and $80 million in local public investment, the project calls for a riverfront park, downtown hotel and convention center, a market square, and an arts academy.

"Property acquisition and the demolition of buildings is under way, and a contract has been given to a developer for a 175-room hotel downtown," says OMPC chair Drew Kirkland. "The county is committed to building a convention center, which it can convert to a basketball arena and convention floor space."

"These are exciting times," says Gary Noffsinger, OMPC's executive director. The city and county are cooperating for the good of the community and focusing on downtown. We tried to do this in the 1980s but we didn't have buy-in from elected officials and economic development folks."

"The city and county governments have gone out on a limb in a stagnant economy to spur downtown development," says Kirkland. The hope is that when the economy improves, the momentum in the downtown will attract additional investment from the private sector.

In anticipation of new building downtown, the city has adopted design standards. "This is new for us," says Noffsinger. "We've had planning and zoning, but never design standards. It will take a little time to see what adjustments we might need to make."

One of the most densely developed cities in the state, Owensboro remains a community of low-rise buildings. "We may see a six- or eight-story condo along the riverfront, but that will take several years to develop," says Noffsinger.

Kentucky's third-largest city, Owensboro is the industrial, medical, retail, and cultural hub for the western part of the state. Roughly 110 miles southwest of Louisville, Owensboro sits just 30 miles southeast of Evansville, Indiana, and is connected to that state via a bridge over the Ohio River. Some 54,000 people call Owensboro home, while about 95,000 reside in Daviess County. One of its fastest growing popuation segments is individuals over the age of 62.

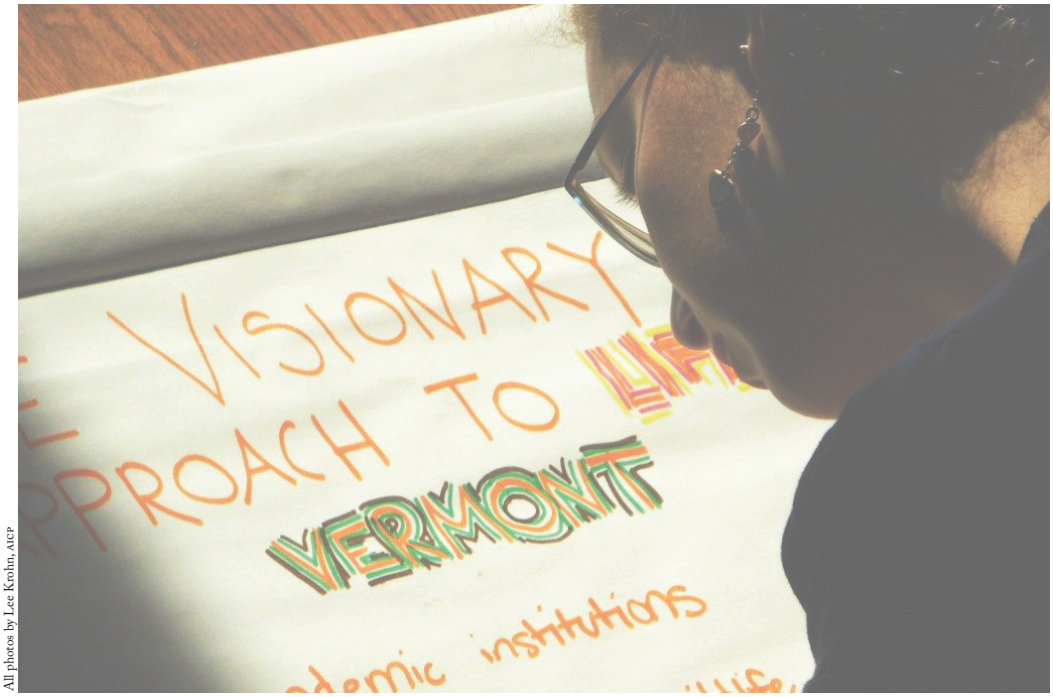
The city's largest industry is health care. "That's why we're investing $350 million in a new hospital," says Noffsinger. "This community is a regional health care provider and a leader in research—biotech and cancer—throughout the nation."

Confident that things are moving in the right direction, Ward Pedley, vice chair of the commission, is optimistic that current developments will pay dividends. "I have seven grandkids and I want them to stay in the community," he says. "The only way they'll stay after college is if the community moves forward and gives them something to come back for."

A Place at the Table: Youths Join Adults on Boards and Commissions

Karen Finucan Clarkson

Through her board participation, Campbell Halligan came to realize the importance of the details; caring about how things look in her community. She looks around town and sees the results of the board's thoughts and decision making.



All photos by Lee Krohn, AICP

"There are a growing number of cities that are using planning commissions as a component of youth engagement," says Leon T. Andrews, director of youth development for the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families. "For those in the youth engagement field, there's been a strong and successful push to develop opportunities for young people to be involved in community decision making—commissions and boards being on the higher end of civic participation."

Across the country, in communities large and small, students have added their voices to those of adults—not just on planning commissions, but boards of zoning appeals, park and recreation boards, school boards, and even city councils. The genesis and structure of the programs vary but the result is often the same—engaged students who not only better understand the role of local government and the history of their communities but who bring a fresh perspective that often makes their fellow commissioners take notice.

"Youth participation revives the community," says Richard Hildreth, the mayor of Pacific, Washington. "Allow kids to take ownership and they'll be more fierce owners than adults. He notes that Pacific has seen a "drop in youth mischief" as a result of the city's willingness to give students a voice in the community and its future. Pacific has high school students serving on both its planning commission and park board.

In some communities, youth commissioners are the outgrowth of existing programs; in others, they are borne of one individual's effort, and in a few, they are the result of happenstance. No matter their origin, Andrews says youth engagement programs are most successful in cities and towns that encourage community-wide civic discourse, offer support to students through mentors or adult allies, provide a range of opportunities for participation, and embrace diversity.

While some communities have put together the whole package, most have only bits and pieces in place, though they hope eventually to offer additional opportunities or improve upon what they already are doing. Still, there's much to be learned from those who have brought youth into the fold.

Manchester, Vermont

It was a confluence of two events that led planning director Lee Krohn, AICP, to look at placing students on town boards and commissions. High school students had successfully assisted with a historic preservation survey and the experience pointed to the promise of youth involvement, while "the utter absence of younger voices" during a discussion of Manchester's energy future pointed to the need, he says. "We learned afterwards there'd been significant debate on the topic at the local high school, but we failed to engage them."

The student board member retreat oriented students to various Manchester boards, developed leadership skills, and helped forge a bond among the students. Students brainstormed about their view of Vermont's future.

Megan LaValley is the first student sitting as a full voting member on the planning board. LaValley; Charlotte Hogan, a former student member of the development review board; and Lani Lovisa, service learning coordinator, enjoyed the adventure of urban transit at the 2009 National Planning Conference in Minneapolis.

After meeting with school administrators, the idea of youth commissioners was proposed and adopted by the town selectmen. "Students helped put the presentation together," he says.

Today, Manchester (pop. about 4,300) has two students on each board—an upperclassman and a lower classman. When one graduates the other moves up and another underclassman is sought. Students must apply for the positions by writing to the selectmen and interviewing with them. To help encourage applications, the school sends home letters to parents. "We didn't just want the usual suspects—the leaders or student athletes," Krohn says.

Students act as commissioners in all capacities except one. Those sitting on the planning commission and development review board cannot vote, because the two panels render legal decisions. "They are minors and, as such, cannot sign contracts, and a decision is akin to signing a contract," he explains.

Still, students sit with commissioners, ask questions, and participate in discussions. Over the past three years, Krohn has observed several instances where students' opinions have swayed other commissioners. On an adaptive reuse project, a youth commissioner suggested a change involving a green strip along the front of the property that would "create symmetry of design," he says. "Everyone loved the idea, including the applicant."

He also noted that in a private deliberative session with the development review board, "a student had a perspective, a certain clarity on the issue that others found interesting."

Manchester's program has proven to be a training ground for future commissioners. In October, a student, who had served two years and was now over 18, was appointed to one of the voting seats. "The planning commissioners were unanimous in wanting her to fill one of the 'real' seats," says Krohn.

Service on Manchester's boards and commissions has "gone beyond the stated purpose of including younger voices," he says. Some students have changed their career choice—in one case, from pre-med to public policy—or their choice of college. It also has given some students roots. "One student told me, 'for the first time I can actually see myself coming back here to raise a family,'" Krohn says. In April 2009 Krohn brought his student board members to the American Planning Association's National Planning Conference in Minneapolis to showcase the Manchester program. The program has also been supported by the Orton Family Foundation.

Fall River, Massachusetts

The City of Fall River (pop. about 92,000) was tired of seeing their "best and brightest go off to college, never to return to the community and reinvest," says youth services coordinator Christian McCloskey. So Fall River established a

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Tips for Creating a Youth Seat

Looking to establish a youth seat on a planning board or commission? Here are some tips from communities that have successfully implemented such a program.

- Determine the reason for involving youth—to give students a voice in the resolution of issues, a better understanding of local government, or roots in the community—and whether commission representation is the best way of accomplishing that.
- Consider how to attract candidates. Many communities work closely with high school guidance offices or other youth organizations.
- After considering state laws, decide if the seat will be voting or nonvoting. In some communities, youth commissioners may vote, and the vote is recorded even though it is not official.
- Develop an appointment process. In some places, schools recommend candidates. Other communities create an application, hold interviews, and have the city or town council appoint the youth commissioner.
- Determine the number of students that will join the panel and how long they will serve. Many communities have just a single youth commissioner serving a one-year term. Others have two, often a junior and senior. When the senior graduates and the junior moves up, a rising junior is offered a two-year term. Those communities with two observe a higher comfort level among students.
- Explore the option of offering students community service hours for graduation.
- Develop an orientation program that not only includes information about planning and zoning in the community but that explains processes, procedures, and legal requirements, *Robert's Rules of Order*, motion making, and ex parte communications.
- Seek out a planning commissioner to serve as a mentor to the student and encourage the chair to consider ways to engage the youth commissioner in discussions.
- Understand that a youth commissioner may have other obligations, including homework, which may occasionally take priority over commission meetings.
- Establish expectations for the youth commissioner, including subcommittee service, involvement in long-range planning activities, and participation in work sessions or retreats.
- Make certain the parents agree to the student's participation and understand the commitment.
- Consider that a student's preferred method of communication—texting, for example—may be different than that of older commission members. Be certain the student understands how information will be shared.

youth engagement program that includes delegates to the school committee, city council, park board, and library board of trustees. Planning is on the horizon, he says.

Having previously adopted a Youth Bill of Rights—only the third city in the nation to do so, according to McCloskey—"youth delegates were the natural next step." Currently, 14 students, including alternates, participate. Two students, a junior and senior, sit on the boards. "That way they feel less intimidated," he says.

Fall River crafted an application for interested students and developed Youth Voice, a "super" youth group with representation from six different organizations, to handle the initial interviewing and selection. A final interview with adults is required of selected applicants.

In January, Fall River youth commissioners attended a training session that included a discussion of *Robert's Rules of Order* and of the importance of developing relationships with others on the board.

Such a mentorship was invaluable to Kayla Arruda, a student member of the school committee. "My mentor's a big proponent of the program and calls me before meetings to see if I have questions," she says.

Despite the hours of prep and meetings each month, Arruda is enjoying her new place at the table. "I can make motions and speak up. I just don't have a vote," she says. She also finds the view from where she sits fascinating. "When you're looking in from the outside, you see things differently than I do now. Not everything is the school committee's fault. There's a lot of history that influences what we can do today and legal requirements that we have to go by."

While Arruda plans to major in engineering next year, she says her committee service "has awakened something in me. In the future I might want to be part of a school committee. Being a superintendent might be an option down the line."

Pacific, Washington

When Aliya Lewis became the first student member of Pacific's (pop. about 9,300) park board, the city was looking to deal with shrinking revenues by cutting back on park maintenance.

"Aliya stood before council in her capacity as a park board commissioner and spoke about how much was being appropriated for the parks," says Jay Bennett, the city's community development director.

Lewis is one of two students to serve on Pacific boards. The other sits on the planning commission. Mayor Richard Hildreth considers youth engagement a priority, and he sees value in adding a younger perspective. "They don't have the life experiences to relate, but they have more energy and their minds are more flexible," he says.

Arlene Hatten, a park board commissioner, concurs. "At 51, there's lots of physical stuff I can't do and Aliya fills in for me. I have knowledge and can fill in for her," she says.

"It's important for adults and youths to meet where they're not in a parent-child situation and can have more of an equal exchange," says associate planner Paula Wiech, AICP. "The experience is invaluable." Such an equal exchange is promoted by giving student commissioners a vote. "If you bring someone to the table and don't give them a vote, then they're really not invited to sit, are they?" adds Hildreth.

In addition to the two youth planning commissioners, the city has two students serving on the conservation commission and one on the housing task force.

Student planning commissioners receive an orientation from Hallsmith, during which she explains the rules of procedure, including how to make a motion and vote. She also describes who on the staff and commission is responsible for what. "I try to make them comfortable with their new status," she says.

Hallsmith noted that some communities have actually made charter changes to ensure the incorporation of youth in civic life. "But if it's part of your city's culture to incorporate youth, I don't think a charter change makes it more likely that the program will continue."

Lucia Bragg's work on the planning commission has empowered her and today she's an active member of the city's district energy committee. "She's been really active and inspiring for other commissioners who've noted her passion," says Hallsmith.

(Left) Manchester planning director Lee Krohn, AICP, toured the Minneapolis waterfront with student board and commissioner members, Charlotte Hogan, Megan LaValley, and Campbell Halligan. (Below) Halligan and Paige Woodward, both of whom served on the design review board, took an active part in the orientation retreat.

While there is no formal training session, Bennett meets with student commissioners to explain the job and the legal issues. "With our planning commissioner, I wanted to make sure he respects the process because we are dealing with issues involving people's property," Bennett says. "I told him, 'you are a full-fledged member of the planning commission and the planning commission is subject to lawsuits. As long as you are acting within your charge as a commissioner, the city covers you.'"

Lewis, for her part, has gotten increasingly involved with the park board. As part of the rewrite of the city's parks plan, Lewis helped develop a Presidents' Day event for the city's youth during which they'd be encouraged to comment about ways to improve the system. She reached out to fellow students, getting them involved as well.

Montpelier, Vermont

"I think part of what made it easier [to move ahead with a student planning commission program] is that we already had a major youth engagement component as part of our long-term planning project," says Gwendolyn Hallsmith, director of the Department of Planning and Community Development. For the past two years, Montpelier (pop. about 7,800) has had two students sit on the planning commission. "They sit with the commission, have name plates like the other members, and vote." While student votes are recorded in the minutes, their votes may not be used to constitute a quorum or break a tie.

Student terms are for one year and are renewable. "We advertise all commissioner openings," says Hallsmith. "Students send a letter of interest and any other information to the city manager. Appointments are made by the city council, just as with all our other planning commissioners."

"Bringing youth on boards is, in our case, part of a commitment to our long-term future. I'd encourage cities to make that commitment and bring youth voices into the discussion of what kind of community we want to leave to our grandchildren," Hallsmith says.

Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina

The application for the Student Involvement Program in the resort community of Kill Devil Hills (pop. about 7,000) seeks to identify youth who "have expressed a committed interest to the fields of public service, history, social or political science, planning, or public administration." Applicants must verify that they have taken or are scheduled to take certain required classes—civics, American history, and AP government.

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The program—which began in 2008, according to planning director Greg Loy—is designed to place a high school junior on the planning board and a senior on the board of commissioners. The junior would move to the new post once the senior graduates, though it's not how it worked the first time out.

Mathews County, Virginia

Youth participation on the county's (pop. about 9,500) planning commission dates back to 1994. A rising senior serves a one-year term. Students also participate on the board of zoning appeals and the wetlands board. All are nonvoting members. Student commissioners are expected to attend all meetings and work sessions.

John Shaw, the director of planning and zoning, provides an informal orientation. In addition to giving an overview of the role of the planning commission, Shaw offers the students some reading and reference materials, including the comprehensive plan and zoning and subdivision ordinances. He also inquires about the student's expectations.

Lawrence, Kansas

Students who serve on the planning commission in Lawrence (pop. about 95,000), a college town, are more land-use savvy than most, as they are enrolled in the planning program at the University of Kansas. "The perspective of a student certainly can be helpful in addressing those town-and-gown issues," says Bradley Finkeldei, the chair of the commission.

"Students bring youth and a fresh, almost utopian, perspective to the board," says Greg Moore, the vice chair. "It's a refreshing approach and reminds me that I was once that way."

Student involvement started in the 1980s, according to Scott McCullough, AICP, the director of planning and development services, and students serve one year as a nonvoting member. "I think it makes them a better planner quicker," he says. "Once they've sat there for a year, they will have been through 24 meetings, some with intense neighborhood conflicts and policy discussions that they would not pick up in a classroom. It goes deeper than a line on a resume. They can draw on the experience on the job."

The experiences in these communities are not isolated. Many more—from Portland, Oregon, to Hampton, Virginia—offer commission-level participation to young people. "This raises the bar, if you will," says Leon Andrews of National League of Cities. "It makes a statement about how a city regards its youth."

Small Downtown Redevelopment

Before starting your downtown plan, see how others have approached this important economic development strategy.

APA Publications

Top Ten Myths of Downtown Planning
Phillip L. Walker
Planning, June 2009

An excerpt from *Downtown Planning for Smaller and Mid-Sized Communities,* APA Planners Press, 2009

APAPlanningBooks.com

The Small Town Planning Handbook
Thomas L. Daniels et al.
APA Planners Press, 2007

Preparing a Downtown Revitalization Plan
AICP CD-ROM Training Package, 2007

Design Guidelines for Small Towns and Rural Communities
AICP CD-ROM Training Package, 2006

New Approaches to Economic Development
APA and Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
CD-ROM Training Package, 2005

Web Resources

Downtown and Business District Market Analysis: Tools to Create Economically Vibrant Commercial Districts in Small Cities
University of Wisconsin–Extension
www.uwex.edu/CES/cced/downtowns/dma/index.cfm

Downtown Revitalization
USDA Rural Information Center, National Agricultural Library
www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/downtown.html

National Trust for Historic Preservation—Main Street Program
http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/

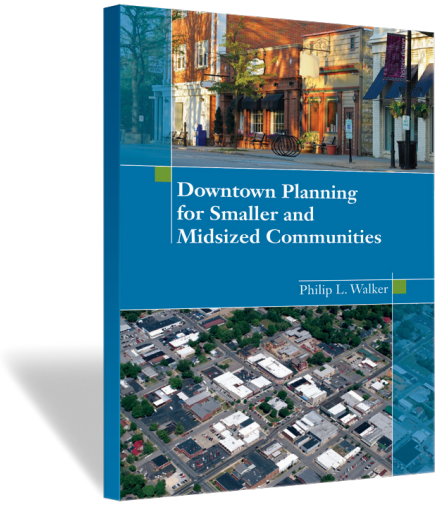
Project for Public Spaces—Downtowns
www.pps.org/downtowns

Reports

Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization
Christopher Leinberger
The Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2005

PDF available online at www.brookings.edu/metro/pubs/20050307_12steps.pdf

New from APA Planners Press



Downtown Planning for Smaller and Midsized Communities

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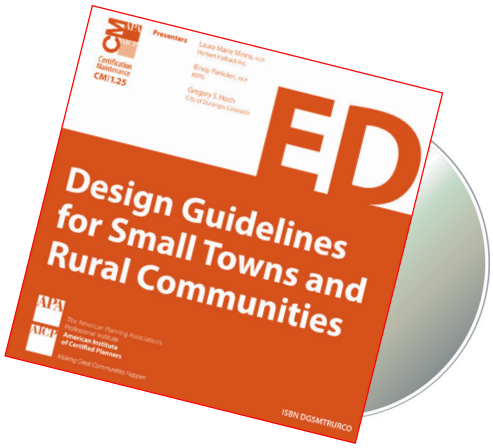

Design Guidelines for Small Towns and Rural Communities

CD-Rom Training Package, 2006

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The True Market for Smart Growth

R. Hunter Gee
Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Planning Commission

Communities around the country are talking about smart growth. While many have developed community-driven visions for their future, implementation remains the challenge.

Small towns are seeing their historic centers and rural character continue to deteriorate. Large cities—economic engines of their regions—lack adequate affordable housing and have aging infrastructure. Mid-tier cities, after years of growth, realize that they have limited land for economic development or open space preservation.

We agree that the market drives economic development and growth. But is there an adequate market for high-density employment centers, urban living, or walkable mixed use retail centers? Cost to the consumer matters. Therefore, "the market" for urban infill is shallow given the cost of land, infrastructure, parking, and building codes plus developers' challenges with land-use policy and zoning, land assemblage, and NIMBYism. Urban infill is difficult, expensive and time-consuming, ultimately costing the consumer more than traditional development.

Ironically, the cost of urban infill to the community is much less. As Chris Leinberger points out in his book, *The Option of Urbanism*, Albuquerque, New Mexico, determined that the public infrastructure costs for suburban households are 22 times more than those in urban areas. Conceivably, we taxpayers are paying 22 times more to provide a cheaper alternative for the consumer. Isn't this the definition of public subsidy?

So the playing field is not level. Until we offset additional developers' costs for urban infill and the community's costs for suburban sprawl, we don't truly understand what the market wants.

The City of Nashville has begun tackling the issue. Under Director Rick Bernhardt's leadership, the Metro Planning Commission has implemented new policy and zoning tools that incentivize redevelopment. The *Community Character Manual*, our new land-use policy application for the entire city, lays the groundwork for intensification coupled with high-quality urban design. Recent rezonings of our entire downtown and a number of our commercial corridors and centers offer developers greater heights, and thus more development potential.

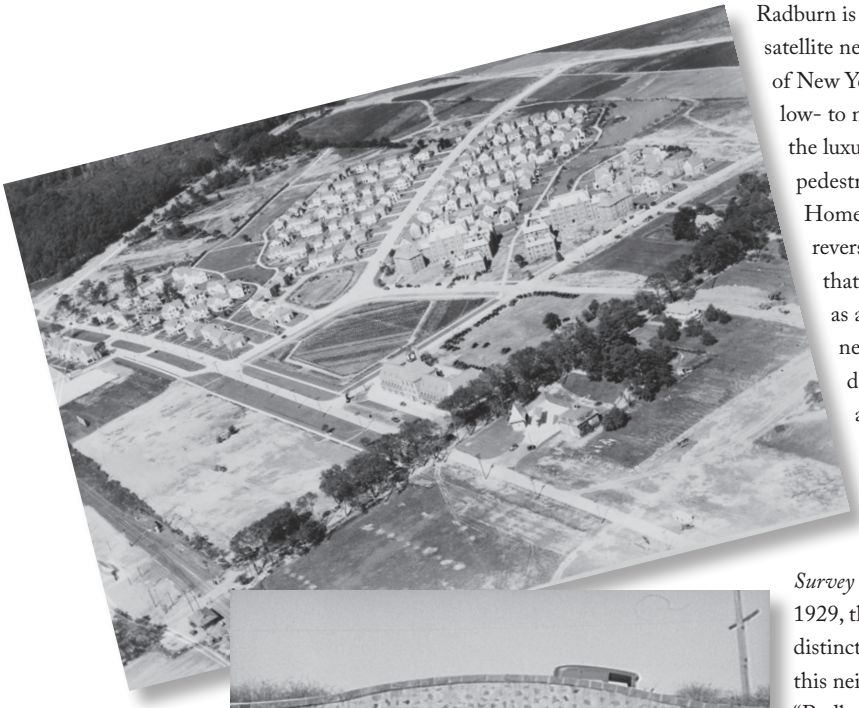
Land-use policy and zoning changes are a first step. Infrastructure-related fees, utility rates, and stormwater requirements in most communities are inequitable, given the cost to the community. Land costs and land assemblage will remain two of the biggest hurdles to overcome.

Regional government and restructuring the tax system and fees are unappealing to most politicians. Schools, police cars, and sewer lines do not vote. People do.

First, people must embrace a common vision that we support in the election booth. Next we must understand the true cost to the community for infrastructure, maintenance, and services. Finally, we must provide our elected officials with a clear roadmap to offsetting those costs, one at a time. Only then will we level the playing field, create choice for the consumer, and understand the true market for smart growth.

Clarence Stein and Radburn, New Jersey

A planner, architect, and member of the Regional Planning Association of America, Clarence Stein was a major proponent of the Garden City movement. In 1929 he and Henry Wright collaborated on the design of a community that would become an icon of this movement and shape the American suburban landscape.



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Radburn is a comprehensively planned satellite neighborhood 12 miles northwest of New York City designed to provide low- to moderate-income earners the luxuries of living in a parklike, pedestrian-oriented neighborhood. Homes in the community are reverse-fronted onto greenspace so that each "superblock" functions as a park. Through a hierarchical network of roads, Radburn was designed to accommodate the automobile while isolating it from pedestrian activity. Borrowing from Clarence Perry's Neighborhood Unit formula published in *Regional Survey of New York and its Environs* in 1929, the plan was organized in three distinct neighborhood units. Stein called this neighborhood design concept the "Radburn Idea," and advocated for its use in federal policy.

Although the Great Depression prevented the full town plan from reaching completion, the Radburn Idea's influence on federal policy has perpetuated Stein's design practices. The Resettlement Administration's new towns were modeled after the Radburn Idea in their use of superblocks and greenspace. In addition, the neighborhood unit concept shaped the design standards developed by the Federal Housing Administration in the 1930s—standards that would be used to approve FHA-insured mortgages.

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